

Evaluator Response: Mid-Cycle Self-Evaluation Report - Centralia College

Evaluators: Kristen Jones and Dan Black

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Overview

Reviewers Kristen Jones and Dan Black visited the Centralia College campus on October 6th and 7th 2014. They were privileged to meet with key leadership and governing bodies for the institution. Their impression is that Centralia is a quality institution that serves both their students and their community. They have well matched programs, quality faculty, and strong leadership to guide the organization.

The reviewers found that Centralia has developed a unique and successful way to involve the faculty in an ongoing cycle of assessment that drives the institution in regard to change and improvement. They have employed a faculty research methodology that asks pertinent questions regarding teaching and learning. From these research projects, decisions are made regarding institutional support for such things as teaching modalities, faculty workload, number of faculty, space utilization, and new programs.

The faculty and staff the reviewers engaged with were positive about the institution and provided a sense that it is an effective learning environment. The students that were encountered expressed positive sentiments about the institution and their learning experience. Centralia appears to be interested in the success of each student that enrolls at its institution.

The reviewer response in this document mirrors the Mid-Cycle Evaluation report that was created by Centralia College. In the following pages, the evaluators have couched their findings as responses to the claims made in that report. The intent of the evaluators is to provide Centralia College suggestions for improving their current process so that they will be more adept at responding to the eligibility requirements and standards for their year seven comprehensive review.

Part I: Assessing Mission Fulfillment

Centralia College is doing many things right in regards to assessment of mission fulfillment. They have developed a broad, overarching mission statement, the Board of Trustees is heavily involved in the evaluation process, and they have developed a process for informing the Board how the objectives for each Core Theme are being met via monitoring reports. In addition, each of the college's four major units are involved in writing the monitoring reports, the reports are shared with the Executive Management Team and the Institutional Effectiveness Committee, and they are available to the entire college community via the internal website.

However, after visiting the campus, the reviewers have come to the conclusion that the college could do a better job of demonstrating how instructional assessment is connected to assessment of mission fulfillment. When talking with faculty, the reviewers were provided with several examples of on-going assessment activities that were not evident in the mid-cycle report. The examples seen during the visit clearly demonstrated the connection between assessment, program improvement, and resource allocation. It is the belief of the reviewers that there is a lack of connection between the Core Theme indicators and the work that is

actually happening on the campus. It is our impression that indicators were selected because of data that is readily assessable at a state-wide level, and while it is efficient to include indicators for which there is available data, this practice may impede development of indicators that could be more meaningful for the institution.

Although the Instructional Assessment Committee has recently done a significant amount of work to solidify their membership, focus, and work plan, the reviewers did not see evidence of a multi-year assessment plan. It is our belief that development of a plan that details how assessment is conducted across the college, how assessment results are used to make programmatic changes, and how assessment outcomes inform the budget process will help the college be prepared for their year seven visit.

Part II: Assessment Examples

Example 1

Centralia provided three assessment examples, all from Core Theme 2, Educational Programs. The college's assessment and progress on the objectives associated with each Core Theme are detailed in monitoring reports which are reviewed by the Board of Trustees and available to the college community. The monitoring reports are written by administrators in each of the college's four major units.

The first example, Academic Transfer, has a stated objective focused on progress, completion and preparedness of transfer students. The indicators appear to match well with this core theme objective and the data is readily available as it is collected at the system level. There are established benchmarks for each indicator and in 2014, the college met or exceeded their benchmarks for all three indicators.

Measurements such as these are valuable as they give a sense of how the institution is doing in regard to other similar institutions and populations. They also appear to be the kind of data that is important to Centralia's Board of Trustees. However, the stated indicators seem to limit the institution in setting meaningful goals and it was difficult for the reviewers to determine how assessment of the current indicators is used to make curricular changes or how it is tied to resource allocation. On the other hand, we learned during our visit about several research projects faculty are engaged in that directly inform factors that impact completion and preparedness such as class size, creation of applied mathematics courses, and creation of new faculty positions.

It is the opinion of the reviewers that additional indicators are needed to fully demonstrate the connection between the Academic Transfer Core Theme and the assessment projects that are being conducted by faculty on a regular basis.

Example 2

The second example provided focused on Transitional Education. One of the major tasks of open entry institution is to ensure that their entering students can be successful at the college level. The indicators chosen provide a picture of the success of the programs as well as point

out an area of concern for the evaluators.

If one examines a set of statements taken completely out of context from the report you find the following:

- "In 2014 the college fell below the state average and the conclusion was that the college did not meet this benchmark."
- "The benchmark is somewhat arbitrary and does not challenge the college to a particularly high standard. It is easy to acquire the data for this indicator as the State Board provides it on quarterly basis."
- "When this report was presented, it was suggested that the benchmark be reviewed as it is based upon factors not directly related to how well the precollege program is working."
- "In each of the four comparisons, the college failed to meet its benchmark. However, the disparity was small and the college asserted it substantially met the benchmark."

These statements raised a concern for the reviewers. The statements suggest the indicators were created based on easily accessible data rather than questions which would give answers to how well the institution is doing in regard to making under prepared students successful. Individuals interviewed during the visit substantiate this claim. The evaluators suggest that the indicators be examined to see if they provide appropriate information for making improvements. Further, it might take the addition of other indicators to allow the inclusion of course, department, and distribution data to inform the core theme objective. The institution has a rich source of real time data derived from the program review process and yet the indicators are not such that this data can be used to inform the objective.

Currently, it appears the link between the overall assessment process and the curricular assessments taking place is weak. By including indicators that allow the curricular review data to become a component of the objective, Centralia could easily illustrate the connection to each level of their assessment process. The reviewers suggest that by including indicators that connect these components, Centralia will be able to illustrate the evidence that it does use assessment data to drive institutional decisions. This will be valuable to future evaluation teams.

Example 3

The focus of example three was the two Bachelor of Applied Science degrees Centralia recently established. It is the understanding of the reviewers that the main objective for inclusion of this example in the report was to provide evidence for the viability and success of these new programs. The Applied Management BAS was first offered in fall 2012 and the Diesel Technology BAS started in fall 2014. Both programs have industry support and meet community needs as well provide transition opportunities for students completing associate's degrees at Centralia.

The Applied Management program is designed to accommodate working students in that they do a large portion of the tasks outside the classroom and then meet twice a week in a flipped classroom modality. The program provides opportunities for students to complete in a two or three-year model based on their available time and career goals. The program appears to be very successful. Of the first cohort of 23 students, 21 graduated in the second year and the remaining graduated in the third year. Centralia is already receiving requests from the business community for interns as well as seeing students receive promotions and advancements in their current jobs. The faculty and associate dean have done an excellent job of tying program and course objectives together. They have also linked graded course assignments to each course outcome via rubrics in their learning management system, Canvas. This practice could serve as a model for other instructional units on campus.

Curriculum for the Diesel Technology program was created in collaboration with diesel faculty from other community colleges in Washington and Oregon as well as with input from four-year programs outside the state. Industry has been a strong supporter of the program as evidenced by participation in curriculum development and donations of equipment. The first cohort of nine students has started and they expect graduates at the end of next year. The intention of the Diesel faculty is to develop an assessment process that mirrors the one being used by the Applied Management program.

It is the opinion of the reviewers that both programs have made sufficient progress and that candidacy status is no longer necessary.

Part III: Moving Forward

Centralia identified several issues they believe should be addressed before the year seven comprehensive evaluation. The reviewers were impressed by the institution's insight and honest appraisal as their analysis matched the reviewers' perspective. Below we have provided feedback on each of the identified topics.

- The college needs to review its mission statement again to ensure it is encompassing the full scope of what it sees as being central to what it hopes to achieve.

The evaluators agree with this sentiment from Centralia and note this was a recommendation received after their Year-One review. Although the mission statement was re-affirmed by the Board of Trustees in 2013 and is broad enough to encompass everything the college does, it appears difficult to assess.

The evaluators still found it challenging to see how the three core themes served to achieve the broader mission. It was also unclear how one could assess mission fulfillment of something such as *Improving people's lives through lifelong learning*. One mismatch is that the core themes seem to assess the current or near future of the institution while the mission appears to be a long range and distant goal. It is also unclear if the focus of the institution is to improve lives or to promote lifelong learning outside the institution.

Although challenging, it is possible to assess the mission to determine if it is being accomplished. For example, one could derive a study to determine if individuals that attend Centralia do spend more time in learning after college than those that do not attend or that by attending Centralia, one does have an improved life. There is no evidence that Centralia is collecting this type of evidence. The reviewers suggest the discussion about how to measure the extent of mission fulfillment and how the core themes are designed to answer the questions described by the mission continue.

The reviewers feel the work done toward addressing the recommendation from the year one report is sufficient and reduces the level of concern. However, the reviewers feel as though more work could be done to address the points mentioned above.

- The college will continue to review and refine its core themes, objectives, indicators, and benchmarks. Although it is confident it is measuring what is important, there are areas where the connections among these is not clear.

The reviewers agree there is work to be done in this arena. In addition, they believe the connection between the course and department assessments and their relationship to the objectives and core themes is lacking. This is discussed in greater detail below.

- The college will work to strengthen the connection between the monitoring reports and institutional planning.

This is a useful goal as the process currently in place for review and feedback on monitoring reports involves several governing bodies at the institution. It appears there is the potential for monitoring reports to be used as a critical step in closing the assessment loop. The reviewers encourage the college to reflect on how to demonstrate how budgetary decisions are made from these reports and curricular, distribution, and program assessment is incorporated.

- The college will make more explicit and strengthen the connection between the assessments taking place at the departmental level and institutional strategic planning.
- The college will examine the connection between assessment of teaching and learning and mission fulfillment.

The reviewers agree this is a problematic area for Centralia. Most of the objectives have been designed based on available external data. It appears the faculty in the departments are actively monitoring and assessing their own courses and feedback is provided at the distribution level. However, these processes appear to be disconnected from the overall mission, core themes, objectives and indicators.

During the visit, the reviewers were surprised to learn of the impressive process Centralia is using to drive decisions at the course and distribution level and yet didn't learn about this in the Mid-Cycle report. Their new assessment practice calls on faculty to create research questions for each of their areas and then seek out the answers to these questions. The faculty that were

interviewed indicated that it was the first time they felt like the assessment process allowed them to answer real questions about their courses and departments and then make adjustments based on the data. Faculty were excited about the research projects and most faculty have not only complied but bought in to the value of doing these assessments. The current administration is making decisions based on the results of these research projects.

It appears that creating indicators that allow the institution to talk about this process would be helpful. The reviewers suggest that indicators be created that have the ability to link the robust curriculum assessments to the outcomes. This would provide evident that the entire evaluation process is connected.

- The college will establish action thresholds for out of compliance monitoring reports.

The evaluators agree that this should be part of a comprehensive evaluation plan.

- The college will publish its monitoring reports on its public facing webpage.

This is a great step toward making the evaluation process transparent and inclusive. The evaluators noticed that the collection of data and evaluation of data is being done by administrative bodies. It is suggested that the process be more inclusive of the entire campus membership. Making the data available publically is a great first step in that process.

- The college will complete the review and revision of its policies and procedures that is currently underway.

This would be a great place to show how assessment data drives the institution. If the assessment data could be used as guidance for the policy and procedure revision process it would provide evidence for completing the assessment loop.

Other

The reviewers found evidence to suggest that the assessment process is not inclusive of every sector of the college. Although this Mid-Cycle review focused on instruction, it was clear that a comprehensive plan to assess every area of the institution did not exist. The reviewers suggest that as part of the preparations for the seven-year review that Centralia actively implement an assessment process that produces measurable data and demonstrate how this is being used to guide all areas of the campus.

Conclusion

Overall the reviewers feel that Centralia is a quality institution that is guided by input from multiple areas of the campus. It appears they have many components of a successful process that creates a cycle of continuous improvement. The reviewers were impressed with the campus and the student success the college is achieving.